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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 002187

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/29/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ KEEPS SPAT WITH SPAIN GOING

REF: SANTIAGO 01825

Classified By: Robert Downes, Political Counselor,  
for Reason 1.4(b and d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: President Hugo Chavez, as well as his political supporters and detractors, are attempting to make political hay out of King Juan Carlos' royal rebuke of Chavez on November 10 at the Iberoamerican summit. The King's "why don't you shut up" sound bite is receiving extensive airplay and has become a greeting between Chavez' detractors. Meanwhile the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) is keeping the pressure on Spain, demanding an apology, issuing veiled threats against Spanish business with official media and praising Chavez for standing up to the original "empire". The rebuke may tickle the opposition, and hurt Chavez' image abroad, but Chavez is using it to take attention away from the December 2 constitutional referendum and continuing student protests. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) "Por que no te calles" (Why don't you shut up?) has become a national catchphrase in Venezuela with the sound bite playing dozens of times an hour on morning and afternoon drivetime radio programs, re-mixed with an electronic beat as a ringtone and as a humorous greeting between friends. While even pro-Chavez Venezuelans may chuckle at the Spanish King's rebuke of their long-winded President at the Iberoamerican summit, this is unlikely to become an effective rallying cry of the "Vote No" block or even the student movement. On the contrary, in his efforts toward damage control, Chavez is using this incident to distract attention from opposition, even within Chavismo, to his constitutional reform package.

¶3. (SBU) Since his return to Venezuela late on November 10, Chavez has been playing the role of aggrieved party, while his government is making a full court press against the Spanish. Citing the difficulties of good relations with "a Prime Minister who defends a fascist and crushes the truth as well as King who insults the dignity of a people," Chavez announced a comprehensive review of political, diplomatic and economic links with Spain during a televised interview on November 14. In recent media interviews, Chavez wondered aloud if King Juan Carlos was going to charge him like an angry bull, accused the monarch of supporting the 2002 coup against him, and said that Venezuelans have 500 years in South America and will never be silenced. BRV Vice President Jorge Rodriguez called the king's comments a "vulgar and cruel" way to address a Venezuelan leader.

¶4. (C) Comment: Chavez appears to be purposely extending his donnybrook with the Spanish king. Although an estimated 1 million Venezuelans can claim Spanish heritage, by playing

the victim, Chavez may not only be achieving some degree of damage control but supplanting some media coverage of ongoing student protests and opposition to his constitutional reforms. End Comment.

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